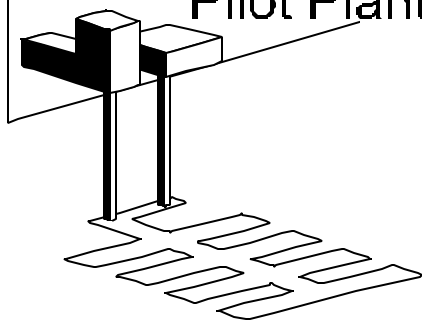


Waste Isolation Pilot Plant



DOE Requests Temporary Authorization To Begin Preliminary Activities for Waste Characterization at WIPP

Summary and background

Protecting human health and the environment is of the utmost importance to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). To this end, DOE is making a concerted effort to remove defense-generated transuranic radioactive waste from 23 sites nationwide and permanently dispose of it at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

The potential consequences of delays in disposing of these wastes was highlighted by the recent Los Alamos, New Mexico (Cerro Grande) and Hanford, Washington fires that vividly showed the vulnerability of stored transuranic waste. Similar storage situations exist at numerous sites throughout the DOE complex.

About 97 percent of all transuranic waste is at six major sites. The remaining three percent is at 18 sites across the country. Before this waste can be disposed of at WIPP, it must be fully characterized (identified and described).

Many of the smaller DOE sites don't have the facilities or funds to perform this characterization. The proposed solution is to characterize waste to meet U.S. Department of Transportation requirements, then ship it to WIPP where it would be characterized to meet regulatory requirements for disposal. This initiative will allow many sites to remove all transuranic waste from their facility in a relatively short period of time without using substantial resources.

On July 21, 2000, DOE submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) a request to modify the Hazardous Waste Facility Permit for WIPP. The proposed permit modification lays the groundwork for a centralized waste characterization facility at WIPP.

What is DOE Requesting?

In order to move forward with this initiative, DOE is requesting from NMED temporary authorization to allow certain modifications to the WIPP Waste Handling Building including the installation of analytical instrumentation to perform waste characterization.

Additionally, temporary authorization will allow:

1. WIPP to accept transuranic waste to initiate the necessary testing to verify quality assurance procedures at WIPP
2. Waste shipments to WIPP for disposal characterization
3. Additional above ground storage capacity and storage areas for the receipt of waste requiring disposal characterization
4. Additional above ground storage time for the duration of the temporary authorization and any subsequent extensions of the temporary authorization.

This request is consistent with the Class 2 permit modification submitted by DOE July 21, 2000, to seek full authorization from NMED for additional above ground storage capacity, additional above ground storage areas and elimination of the time limit for above ground temporary storage

For more Information

For more information about transuranic waste shipments and procedures, or to be placed on the WIPP mailing list, call the WIPP Information Center at 1-800-336-WIPP (9477). Or you may visit the WIPP Home Page at www.wipp.carlsbad.nm.us. If you prefer, write to:

WIPP Information Center
U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Area Office
P.O. Box 3090
Carlsbad, NM 88221

U.S. Department of Energy
Carlsbad Area Office
The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

